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Integrating Information Operations as a Joint Function

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

Information operations (IO) are comprised of core, supporting, and related capabilities, which are currently divided among the six operational joint functions. These unique IO capabilities are often employed piecemeal or are planned as add-ons to courses of action in operational planning. The lack of true integration of IO at the operational level of planning often results in relinquishing the initiative to adversaries in the information environment. This paper proposes elevating information operations to the status of a joint function equal in importance and power as command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment. It further demonstrates that IO is at the heart of developing Joint Operating Concepts and future strategies, applies across the range of military operations, and a Joint Force Commander can utilize IO to weave threads of U.S. legitimacy and credibility across all the phases of an Operational Plan.

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INTRODUCTION

“What is indisputable is that the significance of information is growing at a rapid pace and has a decisive impact on the application of operational art. It increasingly and often profoundly affects the factors of space, time, and force, both individually and in combination.” – Dr. Milan Vego¹

It is time to integrate fully information operations (IO) into the joint war fighting culture of the United States military. Controlling, manipulating, and disseminating information to influence enemy behaviors and gain military advantages are not new concepts in warfare. However, the myriad of threats facing the United States today increasingly seek to operate in the information environment to challenge our national interests.² The emphasis on including the elements and capabilities of IO in joint operations is prevalent. Still, the integration of IO into the Joint Operational Planning Process is inadequate. Joint forces generally display a lack of initiative and offensive spirit when it comes to wielding the powers of IO. The predominant sentiment is that warfighters lack the necessary skills, resources, and guidance to synchronize IO in order to achieve tangible effects on the battlefield.³ The lack of relevant and consistent doctrine has resulted in innovative yet inconsistent execution of IO tasks.⁴ For these reasons, it is time to elevate information operations to the status of a “joint function” on par with the six established joint functions of command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment.⁵ The capabilities that comprise IO make it as unique and important as the other basic functions. Combining the capabilities of IO into a separate joint function will have profound positive effects on how the joint community analyzes, plans, and employs information operations across the spectrum of military operations.

The joint functions are defined as “related capabilities and activities grouped together to help Joint Force Commanders (JFCs) integrate, synchronize, and direct joint operations.”⁶

Joint Planning Group (JPG) members analyze military problems in terms of the six joint functions in order to achieve the JFC's objectives. Without a stand-alone joint function, IO capabilities are often considered separated or as mutually exclusive tasks. The IO core capabilities are psychological operations (PSYOPs), military deception (MILDEC), operational security (OPSEC), electronic warfare (EW), and computer network operations (CNO). The supporting capabilities are information assurance (IA), physical security, physical attack, counterintelligence (CI), and combat camera. The related IO capabilities are public affairs (PA), civil-military operations (CMO), and defense support to public diplomacy (DSPD).⁷ Currently, some IO capabilities are divided among command and control, fires, intelligence, and protection joint functions as displayed in Figure 1, while PSYOPs and MILDEC are not assigned to a joint function at all.

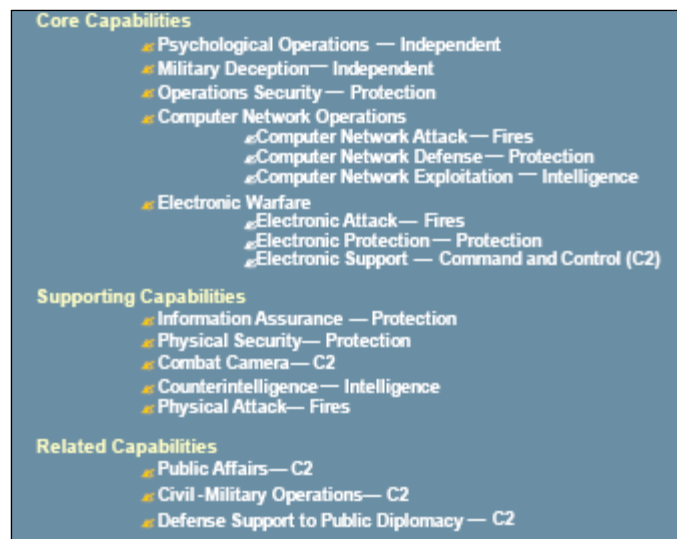


Figure 1: Current IO Relationship to Joint Functions⁸

This trend of dispersing IO-related tasks among subsets of the other joint functions is mirrored in the Universal Joint Task List (UJTL).

The UJTL is the basic language for development of joint mission-essential tasks used in identifying capabilities for mission success.⁹ It organizes a menu of tasks to help operational planners determine what forces are required to achieve those capabilities, and links strategic, operational, and tactical tasks.¹⁰ In addition, the UJTL connectivity serves to demonstrate to combat developers which Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, and Facilities changes are required to affect future force development.¹¹ The operational-level tasks (OPs) are categorized by the six joint functions, which are represented by OP 1 through OP 6.¹² The IO core, supporting, and related capabilities are dispersed throughout the UJTL task listings with little coherence to their relationships with other IO tasks. This disjunction implies that IO capabilities are not interrelated or are not mutually supporting activities. These facts lead to piecemeal planning and reactive application of IO at all levels of war. To fill the gap, different services have approached the problem of defining as well as organizing, training, equipping the elements of IO differently.¹³ The overall result is a relinquishing of the informational initiative to enemies who leverage their informational capabilities to achieve an asymmetric advantage over U.S. forces.

KEY TERMS

The joint community needs to clarify key terms in order to employ IO capabilities more effectively. The 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review Report mandated the military treat IO as a core capability.¹⁴ On the other hand, the Defense Planning Guidance for fiscal years 2004-2009 directed making IO, “a core competency, fully integrated into deliberate and crisis action planning, and capable of being executed as part of supported and supporting operations.”¹⁵ Some sources describe information operations as a domain, when in reality IO

really involves using information to generate effects that apply to all domains.¹⁶ Some describe it as an operational factor, while others call it a force multiplier.¹⁷ The confusion in terms is due in part to the rapid growth of IO capabilities, but mostly stems from the fact the joint community tries to make IO parts fit somewhere under current joint functions.

Redefining IO as a joint function is a way to refocus joint operational planning to achieve operational effects, as well as provide a locus to assign emerging IO technologies and future related capabilities.

Joint Publication (JP) 3-13, *Information Operations*, describes the information environment as “the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information.”¹⁸ The pertinent actors are “leaders, decision makers, individuals, and organizations,” and the resources are “the materials and systems employed to collect, analyze, apply, or disseminate information.”¹⁹ The integrated employment of the core, supported, and related capabilities should be used to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the enemy’s decision-making abilities while protecting our own.²⁰ The JFC can wield these unique levers available in the information environment to directly and indirectly affect the cognitive, physical, and informational dimensions of an enemy, population, or target audience.²¹ In this way, IO can be used as an avenue to attack the mind of an adversary using non-kinetic means. However, IO messages must be congruent with national strategic communications themes to build and maintain long-term credibility.

Strategic communications (SC) is another term that is often misunderstood and misused with respect to information operations. Strategic communications is specific to how the United States Government (USG) utilizes the non-military informational elements of national power. As such, the strategic communication themes should be supported by a

JFC's efforts in the information operations realm, and SC considerations must be integrated into military operations, documented in OPLANS, and coordinated with other governmental agencies (OGAs) and multinational partners.²² It is important that an operational planner understand that the national strategic communications theme originates from the USG and it defines the IO objectives at the operational level.

DISCUSSION

“Mental force does not win a war; moral force does not win a war; physical force does not win a war; but what *does* win a war is the highest combination of these three forces acting as one force.” - J.F.C Fuller.²³

Elevating information operations to a joint function is an evolution of ideas, not a revolution. Exploiting the information environment to achieve military advantages and enable the other dimensions of war is inherent in Sun Tzu's famous axiom, “to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”²⁴ The U.S. military is transforming to meet the needs to combat 21st Century asymmetric threats, and its doing it with IO as an integral part of its strategy. As a result, emerging concepts encapsulated in the Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operational Concept (JOC) and the Army's new operations field manual both emphasize the importance of leveraging information operations to achieve a JFC's theater objectives.

The Irregular Warfare JOC documents a progressive shift in military strategy that focuses on influencing populations, opinions, and the cognitive aspects of state and non-state actors. This is a significant paradigm shift in American warfare from pure kinetic annihilation or attrition strategies. The IW JOC details the need to maintain not only traditional warfare capabilities (characterized by direct military confrontation between the armed forces of states), but to develop ones that control and influence enemy, friendly, and

neutral populations.²⁵ The JOC defines IW as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence,” and recognizes that “IW is about people, not platforms.”²⁶ This idea that the moral forces embodied by a population are a critical strength is touted by war theorists throughout the ages – Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Mao, and recently by John Boyd when he noted, “effectiveness on the battlefield depends on people, ideas, and hardware, in that order.”²⁷ The IW JOC weaves these social, moral, and cognitive aspects into a concept built on a foundation of IO capabilities and tasks.

The IW JOC recognizes the need to maintain capabilities in Major Combat Operations (MCO) while simultaneously building those relative to Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) and IW. The proposed relationship between the JOCs is displayed in Figure 2.

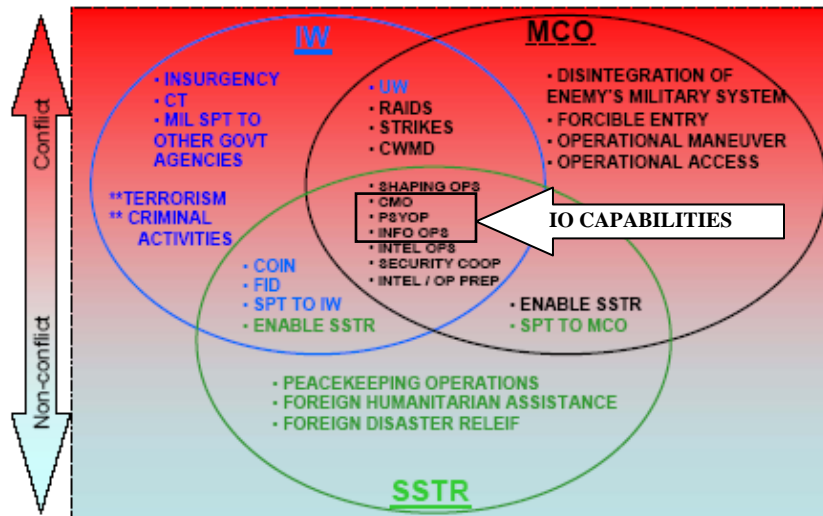


Figure 2: JOC Relationships.²⁸

The common factors between the MCO, IW, and SSTR JOCs highlight the importance of IO capabilities to conducting all future military operations. Information operations capabilities, likewise, are the avenue through which a JFC can wield military power with respect to the “hybrid wars” the U.S. is most likely to face in the future. Colonel

John McCuen argues that future decisive battles will be fought on a combination of asymmetric battlegrounds within “the conflict zone population, the home front population, and the international community population.”²⁹ IO’s unique, stand-alone capabilities can be leveraged to influence and shape the behaviors of each of the hybrid war’s populations of interest to support the JFC’s objectives, as well as balance the negative effects of lethal operations. Other emerging concepts like the new Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0 embrace IO as an effective set of capabilities to employ in parallel with kinetic operations.

The unique warfighting power inherent in information operations capabilities is integral to FM 3-0’s full spectrum operational concept. The Army plans to leverage IO and the concept of “full spectrum operations” to “seize, retain, and exploit the initiative, accepting prudent risk to create opportunities to achieve decisive results.”³⁰ More specifically, FM 3-0 acknowledges that commanders at every level require and will use information, and “must integrate information as carefully as fires, maneuver, protection, and sustainment.”³¹ FM 3-0 stops short of elevating IO to a warfighting function, the Army’s parallel definition for joint function, to avoid conflict with joint doctrine.

JP 5-0 stands as the keystone doctrine for joint operation planning and establishes the different steps of the Joint Operation Planning Process. However, as the primary planning document for joint forces, JP 5-0 fails to highlight the importance of including IO in all phases of planning. The seven steps of the JOPP are Initiation, Mission Analysis, COA Development, COA Analysis and Wargaming, COA comparison, COA approval, and Plan or Order Development.³² These steps mirror the phases of service specific planning methods. Individual service publications, however, tend to better integrate IO as an essential part of sequential planning efforts. The Military Decision Making Process (MDMP) outlined in FM

5-0 allows the Army to establish a G-7, Information Operations Officer, who is dedicated to assisting the planning staff specifically to achieve IO effects.³³ This is vital to developing Courses of Action (COAs) that include IO as part of the plan. The Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP) combines IO with command and control warfare (IO/C2W) throughout its planning document and demands “IO/C2W planning must be coordinated with other operational capabilities” to identify critical information systems, processes, key decision makers, systems, and nodes.³⁴ It is evident that elements of IO have been applied by individual services to a limited extent; it will take the integration of the collective IO capabilities and tasks as a common joint function to harness the full power of IO at the joint level.

JP 3-13 is the joint doctrine document specified to address IO planning, preparation, execution, and assessment.³⁵ JP 3-13 recommends the establishment of an IO cell staff and chief under the J-3 directorate to coordinate IO activities, advocate IO functions during planning, and serve as the liaison between other joint centers.³⁶ As the “J39”, the cell chief acts as the IO subject matter expert for the rest of the JFC’s staff. Further, it recommends establishing representatives for the core, supporting, and related IO capabilities to serve as liaisons to the joint planning group. Clearly, the IO cell is critical to the conduct of IO functions and tasks, but these advancements in IO synchronization are merely organizational changes. Planners also have to change their way of thinking about IO at the basic level. The effectiveness of the J39 to integrate the subject matter expertise resident in the IO cell is incumbent on a proactive and fully engaged liaison. The opportunity exists for JPG members to completely disregard the capabilities of IO and fail to include its effects by relying solely

on IO cell inputs. Limitations in staffing or IO cell liaison unavailability can lead to the marginalization of IO during critical phases of planning.

The 2008 Joint Information Operations Planning Handbook (JIOPH) produced by the Joint Forces Staff College Joint Command & Control and Information Operations School, is the most complete source on how to effectively integrate IO into the JOPP. The Handbook spells out in detail how to integrate IO into each step of planning, and explains why full integration is vitally important to achieving the JFC's objectives. It reiterates three important themes throughout the planning process. First, it highlights it is the Commander's responsibility to ensure COAs and IO themes are coordinated with USG strategic communication guidance. Second, it recognizes IO planners (via the IO cell) must be integrated fully into the planning, directing, monitoring, and assessment efforts to ensure synchronization of IO capabilities. Third, it reiterates that IO planning must be an integral part, not an addition to, the overall JPG planning effort.³⁷ JP 5-0 does not include references to the Handbook, and a JPG would rely solely on the J39 or IO cell representative to incorporate this valuable IO resource.

Joint planners consider the joint operational functions (fires, sustainment, intelligence, etc.) during all phases of the JOPP, but particularly during COA Development, Analysis, and Comparison. The compartmentalizing of core capabilities under different joint functions, like EW and CNO in fires, keep planners from developing synergistic plans to achieve combined effects. The impressions that PSYOPS activities are only planned and accomplished by Special Operations, or that public affairs is not a capability that should be planned by a JPG, all combine to diffuse the capabilities inherent in IO. If a commander fails to direct IO-related essential or specified tasks, or if an IO cell representative does not fully

participate in the planning process, a JPG may miss integrating IO capabilities from the beginning of planning altogether.

The JPG often uses joint functions as governing factors for wargaming during the analysis and comparison phases. The overall result is that IO often becomes an afterthought to military operations, and most times is not integrated to support the schemes of maneuver. Branches and sequels that do not have IO integrated during their development result in reactive IO measures on the battlefield at best. Although “IO is inherently suited to a broad range of expeditionary operations due to its ability to provide a tailored response to a specific mission or crisis environment,” it is more often than not included in branch development.³⁸

Information operations can serve as the common thread across the Range of Military Operations (ROMO). The ROMO “vary in size, purpose, and combat intensity from crisis response, limited contingency operations, military engagement, security cooperation, deterrence, major operations, and campaigns.”³⁹ As a joint function, a Combatant Commander can exercise information operations to serve as the common and consistent engagement tool for a specific region. In Operation Unified Assistance, for example, joint forces assigned to U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) effectively utilized IO to support the PACOM commander’s objectives related to the Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) operations. PSYOPs soldiers provided valuable information to tsunami victims via their broadcast and print capabilities while public affairs personnel broadcast the positive aspects of the story to the world.⁴⁰ The humanitarian efforts affected the predominantly Muslim local Indonesian population in the favor of the United States.⁴¹ However, IO capabilities are not just for building goodwill; they should be planned and employed as part of kinetic operations to mitigate the negative effects.

Robert Steele argues that the best way to integrate IO elements are only in support of six “IO-heavy” operations missions of Information Operations, Peacekeeping Intelligence, Information Peacekeeping, Early Warning, Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations, and Homeland Defense and Civil Support.⁴² While the author agrees with him that IO is effective in these areas, and that “it is imperative that DoD integrate the design, funding, and management of all ... IO elements into a coherent whole,” Steele’s argument fails to recognize the importance IO has during higher intensity conflicts. IO can be used to support military deception plans, to mitigate the negative effects of kinetic operations, or to lay the foundation for transitions to later post-conflict phases. Ignoring the cross-spectrum capabilities of information operations is a myopic view of IO’s capabilities. The lack of planning and integration of IO into limited combat contingencies resulted in such operational failures for Israel during the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war.

Israel failed to integrate IO into planning of branches and sequels of their COAs for the recent limited war with Hezbollah. According to Marvin Kalb of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, “in strictly military terms, Israel did not lose to Hezbollah in this war, but it clearly did not win.” He continues, “In the war of information, news, and propaganda, the battlefield central to Hezbollah’s strategy, Israel lost this war.”⁴³ Hezbollah, who outmaneuvered Israel in the information environment, mitigated the effects of conventional military power. The insurgents seized the IO initiative and broadcast their propagandized version of stories first, and applied this asymmetric advantage to support their overall political objectives. British strategist J. F. C. Fuller’s predictions that “the moral attack on the enemy’s national spirit is becoming more and more the first and decisive object of a war,” reiterates the fact that future battles are likely to be decided by influencing the people

and decision makers of a nation rather than through kinetic annihilation or attrition.⁴⁴ The United States suffered in Iraq from a similar lack of operational IO planning after major combat operations transitioned to counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. While some may point to this fact as a failure of the entire joint planning process, it serves as a great example of how IO as a joint function can keep the established planning habits and processes relevant.

Colonel John Waghelstein and Dr. Donald Chisholm argue that the “ill-structured” and complex nature of modern insurgencies render established planning processes, like the MDMP and JOPP, ineffective for COIN operations.⁴⁵ The crux of their argument stems from the fact that the initial analysis of the problem is paramount, and that conventional planning models inevitably result in an emphasis on heavy-handed, military force to solve counterinsurgencies issues.⁴⁶ However, this is precisely how integrating IO as a joint function can serve the joint planning community. IO offers an avenue to engage the key populations and players with non-lethal means, much like how FM 3-0 plans to wield “information engagement” as part of its full spectrum operations concept.⁴⁷ IO can serve as a stand-alone engagement function or as a group of integrated capabilities employed in concert with fires, protection, and command and control to achieve desired effects. A familiarity with IO starting from Mission Analysis will help joint planners understand the problems more completely. Understanding how kinetic and non-kinetic second or third-order effects caused by leveraging the different joint function capabilities is part of the solution to understanding the dynamic problems inherent in conflicts like insurgencies. Established habit patterns learned through exercising the processes like the JOPP can be altered to integrate pertinent new concepts. IO as a joint function fits nicely into the hybrid wars construct as well as the MCO, SSTR, and IW joint operating concepts. In this way,

operational planners do not have to relearn completely new ways of doing business or abandon proven techniques. The ability to modify and adapt current techniques is sufficient. Recent experiences in Iraq support this idea.

Colonel Ralph Baker, a Brigade Combat Team Commander in Iraq, admitted that initially he was “skeptical of the value of integrating IO into concept of operations,” but found quickly “IO was one of my two most vital tools (along with human intelligence) I would need in a successful counterinsurgency campaign.”⁴⁸ Colonel Baker recognized early on in his tour that the enemy was allowed to operate faster in the information environment, and could manipulate public responses to inflammatory events more quickly. Despite the lack of IO-specific policy and operational guidance, Colonel Baker developed proactive engagement practices and plans that resulted in his unit’s success.⁴⁹ However, it was a lack of centralized IO planning that hindered consistent execution of IO in the field.

Information operations synchronized at the operational level, combined with coherent guidance, can facilitate agile decentralized execution of IO capabilities. This is critical to long-term success in any operation. Colonel Baker noted that effective IO bolstered the trust between his unit and the population in his AO with respect to a COIN effort. To him, there is a “direct correlation between credibility and ability to demonstrably improve the quality of life, physical security, and stability in a society.”⁵⁰ Centrally coordinated programs are essential to avoiding IO fratricide due to non-coordinated efforts. Colonel Baker noted that lack of coordination between neighboring brigades at times resulted in delivery of contradictory information to a target audience, which in turn degraded the overall legitimacy and credibility of U.S. efforts.⁵¹ Simply having IO planned at the operational level was not enough; broad, general themes were often inappropriate or ineffective for the diverse

populations clustered within an AO. Centralized control and decentralized execution can ensure consistent, accurate, and non-contradictory IO messages while maintaining the flexibility needed to maneuver on the battlefield.⁵² Likewise, IO capabilities can focus coherent SC themes to support long-term legitimacy across all the phases of a military operational plan (OPLAN).

The phases of an OPLAN are Shape (Phase 0), Deter (Phase 1), Seize the Initiative (Phase 2), Dominate (Phase 3), Stabilize (Phase 4), and Enable Civil Authority (Phase 5).⁵³ Phase 0 and 1 are enduring phases for a Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) and inherent in a Theater Security Cooperation Plan (TSCP). The capabilities cemented in PSYOPS, PA, DSPD, and CMO are well suited to support the GCC in this realm as well as in developing Military Flexible Deterrent Options. IO is useful in Phases 2 and 3, but because IO has yet to be considered comparable to the other joint functions, joint planners devise “kinetic campaigns and maybe consider adding a public affairs annex” only after major planning efforts have occurred.⁵⁴ Consistent application of IO across the phases of an operation, particularly in Phases 4 and 5, can maintain effective engagement with foreign nations, civil populations, and participating forces.⁵⁵ The main objective of COIN operations is to build and maintain the legitimacy of U.S. efforts; this is equally important to any future military operation.⁵⁶ Effective, synchronized IO can weave a foundation of legitimacy throughout the execution of an OPLAN.

CONCLUSION

“You know you never defeated us on the battlefield,” Colonel Harry Summers, USA.

“That may be so...but it is also irrelevant.” Colonel Tu, NVA.⁵⁷

Information operations may be a relatively new military term, but how the relative concepts apply to influencing adversary behaviors are not. Colonel Harry Summers' conversation with Colonel Tu demonstrates the simple fact that one can be successful in all areas of warfighting, but doomed to fail without the integration of coherent and consistent IO.⁵⁸ Operational planners must support the USG's strategic communications message throughout all planning efforts. The JOPP is the avenue through which to weave effective IO into plans, to include branches and sequels. The growth in IO-related technologies and progressive transformation of the military demand reorganization of the IO-related UJTL tasks in order to take full advantage of IO capabilities. Organizing the IO core, supporting, and related capabilities under a single operational-level task related to a single, stand-alone joint function, will serve to focus synchronization of future IO-related developments. IO must be integral to COA development in order to match the SC messages with military actions. As General Patton simply stated, the best way to build and maintain credibility is to "say what you mean and mean what you say."⁵⁹ The national leadership may set the message, but military members exercising operations across the ROMO through all phases of conflict will deliver the messages of the Joint Force Commander to the pertinent audiences.

Current doctrine and JOPP structure allows piecemeal, disjointed application of IO capabilities. Joint planners do not have to consider IO in COA development or wargaming. They can instead rely on the SME from the IO cell to 'add some IO' to the plan. In addition, there is no established feedback loop to the JPG to enhance pre-planned branches and sequels. IO represents the missing link to attacking the enemy's ability to make decisions and influence populations, and it should be leveraged as a joint function. Like John Boyd

said, “humans fight wars... you must get into the mind of humans... that’s where the battles are won.”⁶⁰

There is a need for commanders at all levels to become as aggressive and offensive-minded with information operations as they have always been with other elements of combat power and warfighting functions.⁶¹ The principle of maneuver is historically reserved for reference to physical forces of men; but “placing the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power” applies equally as well in the information environment.⁶² Properly planned and executed IO can even “minimize the enemy’s opportunity to inflict casualties that might otherwise result from close combat.”⁶³ A paradigm shift in what the U.S. military considers combat power is required. Wielding the kinetic hammer to solve short-term military problems is becoming less conducive to achieving long-term solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not on those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur.” – Giulio Douhet⁶⁴.

The author recommends changing joint doctrine to reintroduce information operations as a new joint function that encompasses all the core, supporting, and related capabilities currently identified with IO. Commanders can leverage this new joint warfighting function to achieve operational objectives and produce desired effects. Organizing IO current capabilities under a single joint function will help focus and synchronize the related capabilities rather than marginalize them. The Universal Joint Task List should be reorganized to reflect the change in operational tasks relative to IO. This will provide coherency in task relationships, and facilitate critical funding, training, and education for all future capabilities related to IO. The exponential growth in technologies, capabilities, and

power of IO can be better managed as doctrine progresses. The author recommends that JP 5-0 specifically reference the Joint Information Operations Planning Handbook to educate joint planners at every level of expertise, not just those assigned to the IO Cell. This will ensure disciplined planning to produce logically derived targets, tasks, themes, and measures that are consistent with strategic objectives.

The author firmly believes that fully integrating IO efforts across the range of military operations is a key to building long-term credibility among partners and ensuring the legitimacy of U.S. efforts through all phases of operations. Implementing new ideas into military doctrine is an iterative process, and the author recognizes that simply elevating IO as a joint function is not a final solution or a silver bullet. However, it is an important interim step in the evolution of the U.S. military culture: a culture that is transforming to meet the challenges of 21st Century warfare.

ENDNOTES

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